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S E C R E T.

W.P. (39) 5.

COPY NO. 21.

WAR CABINET.

NORWEGIAN NEUTRALITY.

Report by Chiefs of Staff Committee.

Note by the Secretary.

By direction of the Prime Minister, I circulate herewith for the information of the War Cabinet, the attached Report by the Chiefs of Staff Committee dealing with Norwegian Neutrality. (Paper No. C.O.S. (39) 7).

(Signed) E.E. BRIDGES.

Secretary.

Richmond Terrace, S.W.1,

4th September, 1939.

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S E C R E T.

O.S. (39)7.

COPY NO. _____

WAR CABINET.CHIEFS OF STAFF COMMITTEE.NORWEGIAN NEUTRALITY.REPORT.

We have had under consideration Foreign Office letter No. N. 1764/64/63 of 24th August, 1939,^{*} in which Lord Halifax invites our view of the commitments involved should a confidential but formal intimation be made to the Norwegian authorities to the effect that His Majesty's Government would regard a German attack on Norway as tantamount to an attack on this country. Lord Halifax points out that the sympathies of both the Norwegian Government ~~and~~ the people would be likely to favour the British cause to a greater extent perhaps than in any other neutral country; and that the co-operation with British blockade measures in the fullest degree compatible with technical neutrality might be hoped for from Norwegian private interests, if not from the Government, provided only that the average Norwegian was persuaded that his country could, and would be protected by Great Britain, if necessary by force, against possible German reprisals.

2. We are advised that, on balance, the importance of Norway as a wartime source of supply and facilities to Germany will probably be greater than her importance as a source of supply and facilities to Great Britain and her allies. In particular Germany must necessarily obtain the

^{*}Annex.

greater proportion of her essential supplies of Swedish iron ore through the Norwegian port of Narvik. A refusal by Norway to continue exporting iron ore from Narvik would have a very large economic effect on Germany. We think therefore that it seems unlikely that Germany will initiate any attack on Norway except by way of reprisal and even then only if Norwegian neutrality were to assume such a degree of benevolence towards the allies as to interfere with iron ore supplies.

3. On the other hand Norway derives from the territories of the Allies many essential foodstuffs and industrial raw materials which Germany could not supply and of which Norway herself holds no large stocks. The Allies are thus in a position to exercise very strong economic pressure upon Norway in war, if His Majesty's Government should permit the exercise of this power to its fullest extent compatible with international law in order to compel Norway to stop exporting Swedish iron ore. In these circumstances it is probable that Germany would wish to institute reprisals, but it is still difficult to see that she could take any action other than economic and diplomatic without jeopardising an essential source of supply.

4. We will, however, consider briefly what forms German military reprisals could take. A seaborne expedition in the face of superior British naval forces would be attended by very serious risks.

Any such operations against Norway's western seaboard can be dismissed as impracticable for this reason. An operation directed against the Southern coast is less improbable owing to the shorter distance but even so would be a risky undertaking the results of which would not be commensurate with the effort involved.

5. Sporadic attacks against Norwegian ports and trade are more probable, especially in the Southern area where German naval forces would run less risk of interception. Complete protection against submarine attack could not be guaranteed but the attacks themselves could produce no decisive effect.

6. As regards air attack, German striking forces could reach vulnerable points in Southern Norway from bases in Germany, and, as a last resort, the Germans might undertake sporadic air attacks as a form of reprisal. We can of course accept no commitment for the direct air defence of Norwegian territory but our offensive operations against objectives in Germany could indirectly reduce the extent of such a threat.

7. Apart from reprisals the Germans might endeavour to establish either openly or clandestinely, submarine or air bases on the Norwegian coasts. The Foreign Office letter refers specifically to the possible seizing of the Stavanger aerodrome, presumably as a base for operations against British naval forces and trade in the North Sea. In these circumstances Norway would not be likely to incur the risk of losing her neutrality by taking military action herself even though it would be within her rights as a neutral to do so. On the other hand she might be quite content to afford us facilities for ejecting the

~~offending Germans. This it would be necessary in our~~
own interests to do if the operations of these German
submarines and air forces were producing sufficient effect
to warrant it.

8. It appears therefore that, with the exception of
the direct protection of Norway against air attack, all
other forms of possible German action against Norway fall
into the category of operations which it would be in our
own interest to combat, and which we could undertake with
a reasonable chance of success.

9. To sum up, therefore -

- (a) It appears to be in the German interest
that Norwegian neutrality should be respected.
- (b) If, nevertheless, due to the benevolence
of Norway's neutrality to us Germany institutes
military reprisals, it would be in our own
interest to come to Norway's assistance,
except that as regards direct air attack by
Germany our assistance could only be indirect.
- (c) We therefore see no objection to a confidential
communication being made to the Norwegian
authorities in the sense suggested by Lord
Halifax so long as it is clearly understood
that no assistance as regards direct air
attack can be given.

(Signed) C.L.N. NEWALL.

DUDLEY POUND.

E. IRONSIDE.

Richmond Terrace, S.W.1.,

4th September, 1939.

ANNEX.

Ref. No. N 1764/64/63.

Foreign Office,
S.W.1.

24th August, 1939.

Sir,

I am directed by Viscount Halifax to inform you that he has had under consideration the means available for encouraging pro-British elements in Norway and thus influencing the general attitude of the Norwegian authorities in the event of war.

2. The reactions of the Norwegian Government and Norwegian public opinion towards the blockade policy of His Majesty's Government are likely to be of great importance in view of Norway's geographical position and of her shipping and other resources. His Majesty's Minister at Oslo has reported that the sympathies both of the Government and of the people would be likely to favour the British cause, to a greater extent perhaps than in any other neutral country; and that co-operation with British blockade measures in the fullest degree compatible with technical neutrality might be hoped for from Norwegian private interests, if not from the Government, provided only that the average Norwegian were persuaded that his country could and would be protected by Great Britain, if necessary by force, against possible German reprisals.

The Secretary,
Committee of Imperial Defence.

3. Until a few months ago, however, the average Norwegian was by no means persuaded of this - indeed, Sir Cecil Dormer recently reported that there was a widespread belief to the contrary, which was having a serious effect on the general Norwegian attitude towards this country; and, though more recent developments may have somewhat shaken this belief, it seems clear that it still has considerable influence on the Norwegian attitude.

4. Both Sir Cecil Dormer and Mr. Freese-Pennefather (who has acted as *Chargé d'Affaires* in his absence) have done their best, in private conversation with any Norwegian with whom they have been able to discuss the subject, to make them realise that, for obvious strategic reasons arising from Norway's geographical position, this country will always be obliged to regard an attack on Norway as an attack on herself. They have not, however, been authorised to state definitely that this is more than their own personal view (except as regards the possibility of a German attempt to seize the Stavanger aerodrome, on which specific point Mr. Freese-Pennefather was recently authorised to tell the head of the Norwegian Air Force that "if German forces were to seize the aerodrome, British forces would of course attempt to dislodge them and would expect Norwegian assistance in this"); and it seems probable that if they could make it plain in the right quarters that this was the definite view of His Majesty's Government also, the effect would be considerable and far-reaching.

5. It need hardly be emphasised that this would not be equivalent to giving Norway a public guarantee of the kind given to Poland or Roumania. The Norwegian Government, indeed, do not want such a guarantee; but at the same time, in Sir Cecil Dormer's opinion, the individual members of that Government would be by no means averse from learning privately from him that what he has said to them on his own authority does, in fact, represent the policy of his Government.

6. Lord Halifax will accordingly be glad to learn as soon as possible what view the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee would take of the commitments involved in the issue of instructions to His Majesty's Minister at Oslo to speak to the Norwegian authorities on these lines, intimating confidentially but formally that His Majesty's Government would regard a German attack on Norway as tantamount to an attack on this country.

I am, etc.,

(Signed) D.W. LASCELLES.